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ABSTRACT

The International Planned Parenthood Federation meeting report places priority on the development of sex education programs in Latin America. While regional and national circumstances clearly differ, it was felt that the steps described provide valuable guidelines on how a sex education program can be evolved while utilizing formal and non-formal educational structures. An analysis of common elements in various countries revealed that a sex education program develops through the following phases: perception of the need; association with others to supply information; awareness among a large number of people; implementation of co-ordinated action; official acceptance of sex education; and consolidation of all efforts. The report makes it clear that those responsible for organizing wide-ranging education programs at formal and informal levels need the support of private agencies and organizations capable of nurturing the program during its initial stages of development. (BN)

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STRATEGY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEX EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

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A Study by an Expert Commission convened by IPPF/WHR
New York, October 26-28, 1976

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Note

This report has been translated into English from the original Spanish by IPPF Central Office in order to share with countries in other parts of the world ideas on the development of sex education which are emerging in Latin America. The Western Hemisphere Region of IPPF gives high priority to supporting such programmes and it is hoped that the approach to evolving a national sex education strategy described here may be of interest to other IPPF regions anxious to promote a dialogue between FPAs and governments in this field.

Education Department
IPPF Central Office

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INTRODUCTION

In 1975, the Western Hemisphere Region of the International Planned Parenthood Federation, anxious to enlarge its services to reach the entire population of Latin America, adopted a vigorous policy for sex education. In carrying out this policy, the Federation obtained the generous support of the Kellogg Foundation, whose financial help enabled it to undertake a number of important activities.

The present report gives a clear picture of the strategies followed by the Federation. It would have been quite possible to outline a plan to be implemented by its network of member associations in all countries of the Western Hemisphere. However, it seemed more sensible to seek the advice of individuals who had experienced the day-to-day conditions of sex education in Latin America, and had acquired a wide experience both in their own countries and beyond their national frontiers, thus enabling them to assist the IPPF in a more exact evaluation of the present situation, as well as formulating recommendations on the best way to implement the sex education programmes for the benefit of all our young people.

Accordingly, we present the joint findings of the Latin American experts, who unanimously declared the urgent need for giving new direction to our young people, through the establishment of sex education programmes, as well as a better co-ordination of already-established curricula, in order to make them truly useful to the individual during the development of his or her personality.

The IPPF Western Hemisphere Region wishes to thank each and every one of the expert members of the Technical Commission for their unselfish contributions, and at the same time feels stimulated to implement vigorously the strategies they suggested.

Finally, through this report, the Federation calls on all readers to contribute, in whatever way is considered most appropriate, to the official adoption and implementation of sex education programmes for schools in our countries, for the benefit of all young people.

Information & Education Department
IPPF/WHR

DIAGNOSIS

We start from the principle that the subject of sex, traditionally a difficult one*, has today become an issue of conflict which has led children, young people and adults into a real crisis of disorientation, and consequently to a search for reliable information from responsible sources.

It would be too lengthy to enumerate *all* the existing problems, and it is difficult to establish which should be the priorities, in order of difficulty, without first studying these problems in depth.

We merely seek to outline here some of the problems that have been identified and recognized as such by priests, doctors, sociologists, psychologists, teachers, etc, in carrying out their responsibilities, which in turn increasingly express the preoccupation of parents and educators, and are therefore becoming real needs felt among different sectors, groups or individuals in our societies. Among these problems we may mention the following:

- Sexual disfunctions.
- Stereotyped sexual roles ('machismo' or 'female chauvinism').
- Pre-marital and extra-marital births.
- Unwanted pregnancies.
- Abortion.
- Venereal diseases.
- Problems of communication within the family.
- Disintegration of the family.
- Lack of acceptance of one's own sexual identity, etc.

From an educational viewpoint, the problems mentioned above produce a widespread sense of inability to find means of solving them, particularly when faced with two of their most concrete manifestations:

a) An ever-earlier start of sexual activity among adolescents, possibly resulting in disturbing consequences for their personal, family and social lives.

b) The influence of mass media, every day more powerful and apparently uncontrollable, directed towards a commercialized exaltation of sexuality, and an important contributory factor to the individual's alienation from an oppressive consumer society.

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* *Based on personal experience of the members of this Commission, as well as information contained in the abundant literature available.*

Faced with this situation, we must recognize that educational efforts will encounter barriers that must first be overcome if sex education is to be really effective. To date, we can note that:

- The work carried out in the field of sex education during the last decade has involved a great variety of activities which have created a basis for the development of future programmes.

- Analysis and evaluation of these activities have shown clearly the growing need for taking new steps towards broader and more intensive programmes which might offer satisfactory answers to the increasingly pressing problems presented by sex.

- This fact faces educationalists on the one hand, and individuals, the family and society itself on the other, with very real difficulties which, we believe, should be identified as precisely as possible.

- Barring very rare exceptions, sex education has been absent from the traditional curricula of general education.

- Where some effort has been made to give sex education, this has generally been fragmentary and unsystematic.

- Thus, the work carried out in this field has taken on very particular forms in the various countries where it has been tried, with differing and, in the main, insufficient degrees of efficiency and co-ordination.

- Most of these activities have involved an inadequate concept of sex education, giving excessive (exclusive or very prevalent) emphasis to the biological aspects of sex.

- This approach in turn has meant that too much emphasis has been placed on the purely reproductive aspects of sexuality, resulting in programmes and curricula of a decidedly medical or paramedical nature, to the detriment of all psycho-social aspects.

- In this sense it is important to note that such sex education as has been carried out, has invariably tended to limit its objectives and content to information (mere transmission of knowledge), with little or no emphasis on the formative, educational aspects of the subject, which aim to encourage students to adopt critical and mature attitudes and behaviour.

- This excessively intellectual and abstract character of the education which has been offered does not seem to have made it very effective in bringing about significant changes in the students' every-day life. This negative result is further emphasized by the poor success obtained in involving parents and older people, although their contribution to the task in hand would seem to be of vital importance.

- The educators and other professionals concerned have worked under great difficulty due to their frequent isolation from each other and lack of co-ordination. Added to this constraint is the fact that other, related disciplines with parallel objectives have not given clear recognition to the importance of sex education as an integral and dynamic component of their own programmes.

- Possibly, one of the common denominators in all these difficulties is the lack of a clear, unanimously accepted, functional definition of what is understood by sex education.

- At the same time, this absence of a clear definition can be seen as stemming from the lack of comparison and critical evaluation of the different concepts and trends underlying the various programmes being developed.

- It is also important to note that the almost exclusive emphasis on family and social aspects of sexuality has masked the key importance that healthy and satisfactory psycho-sexual development has for each individual.

- As for sex education outside the school setting, its incorporation in community programmes is notable by its absence, despite the fact that these programmes generally include among their objectives the achievement of personal and social maturity.

Dimensions of Sex Education

We should not like to fall once again into the trap of reducing sex education to a single definition. The field of sex education is a complex one, dynamically inter-related to human activity as a whole. Therefore, we consider that rather than producing a definition, it is important to outline the dimensions of the area as a whole:

- Sex education is concerned with the individual as a subject of inter-personal relations, living within a given historical and geographical context.

- Sex education concerns itself with the process of human development; at each stage of his life, man's personality is influenced by the inter-action of psychological, biological and social phenomena.

- Sex education is part of general education; it plays a key role in the development of mature behaviour and attitudes.

- Therefore, sex education implies the following:

  - education for 'being' rather than for 'doing' and 'having'

  - education aimed at creating self-awareness and communal responsibility

  - education for personal and social development

  - education for love and for life

- Thus, sex education, conceived of in terms of education for life, will contribute qualitatively to the development of well-balanced individuals, adjusted to their social and sexual inter-personal relationships, and to the formation of quantitatively well-balanced families, thus underlining the clear link between sex education and responsible parenthood.

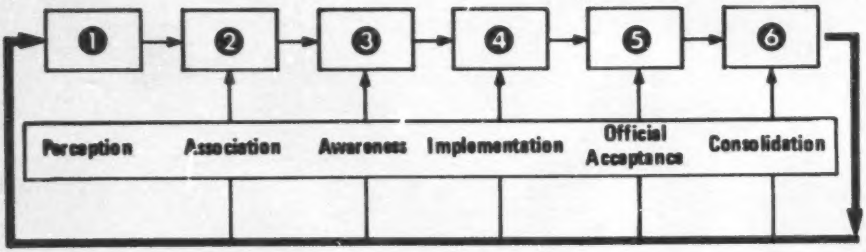
CURRENT NEEDS IN SEX EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA

A. The Development of Sex Education Programmes: A Descriptive Model

Needs in the field of sex education in any country are directly related to the programme's level of development.

By analysing common elements in various countries a picture emerges of the phases through which sex education passes in the course of its development. We can start by describing the process by which sex education comes to be accepted. As in many processes of change we can observe the following stages, summarized in figure 1.

Figure 1

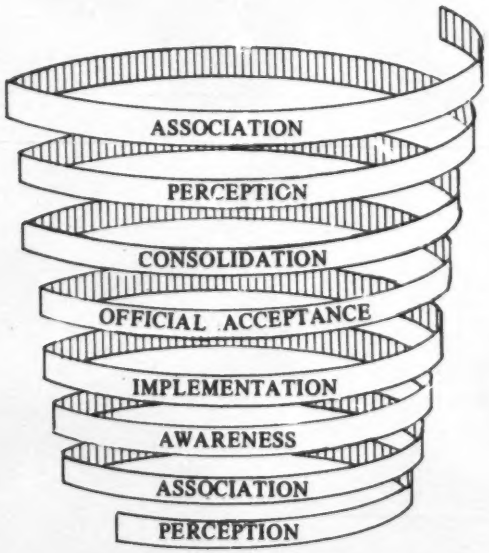


As in all cyclic systems, each single phase of the process affects the others.

This logical evolution will not always occur in the same order in every country, though these phases can be expected to repeat themselves on a cyclical and continuous basis for different sectors of the same population.

Nevertheless it would be possible to represent this process as an ascending spiral in which one stage is the basis and springboard for the following one (figure 2). This same process has been observed in various countries.

Figure 2



B. Needs

Taking the above model as a basis for analysis we can identify the principal needs which emerge at each stage. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that any needs identified at a given moment or at a certain stage might well appear at other stages, since one of the model's characteristics is the inter-relationship of its phases and its cyclical nature. Consequently, in one particular country, for example, we could identify the teaching of sex education in phase 4 'Implementation' without this meaning that the previous phases have been completed, and without the next stage of 'Official Acceptance' necessarily following. We pass on to describe each of the six stages outlining the most important needs to emerge.

1 Perception

In each new generation there are individuals who perceive the need for sex education in their role as parents, spouses, teachers, counsellors, etc.

Each time another member of the community becomes aware of the importance of sex education, it strengthens its base, although the cause of sex education only advances in the later stages.

The following are the needs identified at this stage:

- Identification of effective agents and means of change.
- Base-line surveys to build up a clear knowledge of the problem.
- Identification of the obstacles which might hamper or obstruct the spread of the new idea.

On this basis it will be possible to evolve a motivational strategy directed either to specific groups or to the general public, with the aim of reaching the greatest number of people, making them aware of the importance of sex education.

2. Association

In this second stage we consider the activities of all those who, once they have felt the need, will *participate in communicating it to others,* or, in association with others, will supply information, education, counselling or treatment.

Private groups are created at this stage, which establish more or less organized networks, and whose effectiveness depends on the professional competance and joint power of their members.

These organizations, examples of which exist in every country, have such varied objectives as helping the family, supporting the right of responsible parenthood, informing and educating the public on human sexuality, setting up clinics, promoting research etc.

The following can be mentioned as being among the important needs at this stage:

- Identification of organization and programmes, either totally or partially concerned with sex education.
- Formal or informal co-ordination of institutional and personal efforts.
- Redefinition of institutional roles, philosophy, goals and programme objectives.
- Publicizing of programmes, organizations and available services.
- Identification of any legal provisions that could further the extension of programmes, as well as those that could hinder their development.

3. Awareness

Private effort, in conjunction with the activities of the mass media, result in wider knowledge among a larger number of people, Thus, *awareness* is 'a state of individual consciousness – and in this case public as well – of the need for sex education in a given community'.

If information was the key to initiating this process, awareness is necessary to consolidate it at its later stages. It is not enough to inform public opinion – it is necessary to educate the public through more intensive methods at all levels, from the private sector to the public.

This organized or spontaneous activity will generate awareness among the members of the community, who in turn may exert pressure on official bodies (ministries of education, health, social welfare, etc) to induce them to take action.

Although it is true to say that, in many countries, public opinion has little influence on governmental decision-making, it is also true that sex education cannot be enforced vertically – although it would be possible to promulgate a law, it would be impossible to enforce it without previously deciding on the 'who' and the 'how'.

For this we need the co-operation of well-motivated personnel and agents of change to carry out the new legislation. Thus, the following needs arise at this stage:

- Information and motivation of leaders.
- Training of those 'agents of change' who come in direct contact with the community.
- Motivation and awareness of those in charge of all mass media, whether concerned with the provision of information or entertainment.

4. Implementation

Faced with this growing awareness of the problem and the emergence of isolated activities, it is necessary to take measures to implement co-ordinated action. This usually takes place at the private level where information and service programmes are evolved with the double aim of serving the more needy sectors of the community and at the same time being developed as models for larger programmes. The setting-up of pilot projects is typical at this stage.

Some experimental programmes can be carried out jointly by official and private bodies.

Priority needs at this stage are the following:

- An accurate diagnosis of the situation.
- Establishment of priorities, bearing in mind those problems which require the most urgent solution or those groups of the community most in need of assistance.
- Programming, by establishing objectives, methodology and human and financial resources.

The following areas emerge as particularly important:

- Training of personnel at all levels.
- Evaluation and follow-up of the programme.
- Development of educational material.

5. Official Acceptance

The degree of general consent needed to obtain official action in this field depends on various circumstances, among them the favourable attitude of the authorities and the priority they are able to give to sex education.

The immediate result of awareness and support at high governmental levels is for the government to facilitate the setting up of *study groups or committees.* These may either be merely tolerated or may receive full support. In some countries these working commissions have succeeded in producing key documents for national action, but which then, in spite of the necessary resources being available, have been simply filed away. In more fortunate instances, support has been provided for carrying out a pilot project. To date, very few countries have adopted legislation for the phased implementation of a well-thought-out programme. In such cases, it would be interesting to analyse the way in which the stages previous to 'Official Acceptance' have been achieved. No doubt it would transpire that the activity demonstrated by pilot and experimental projects carried out by private bodies was of the utmost importance in bringing about official acceptance.

The needs at this stage are as follows:

- Establishment of contact between official and private bodies at both national and international level.
- Establishment of 'mixed' (official and private) commissions for the development of curricula and programmes.
- Establishment of standards, laws and regulations to ensure that programmes are set up and carried forward.
- Acceptance and exercise of responsibility at official levels.
- Wide publicity among the general public for such standards, laws and regulations that not only will make them aware of the existence of these programmes but will move them to demand the information and services they can offer, thus ensuring their continuity.

6. Consolidation

Following gradual official acceptance, during which existing needs, interests and human resources have been assessed (perhaps through pilot projects), sex education should be implemented in the country concerned through all available channels.

Consolidation of the programme should be carried out in accordance with national priorities, but there seem to be certain basic requirements to be fulfilled if the programme is to succeed:

- Training at pre-graduate level (future professionals) and post-graduate level (in-service courses).

- The content of these courses should not be limited to anatomy and physiology – it should also include related areas (psychology, anthropology, etc), aimed at providing knowledge and orientation in attitudes and values.

- Use of combined educational media, such as radio, printed material and personal contact.

- Programmes of non-formal education, to complement the established formal education programmes, bearing in mind the high drop-out rate from schools in our countries and the urgent needs of the large number of groups outside the formal educational system.

It is important to bear in mind the need to involve all sectors of the population in the benefits that a sex education programme can offer. Thus, we must plan various activities aimed at the parents of students within the formal educational system, so that they do not become hostile to the programme due to lack of understanding of what it entails.

The important needs at this stage are as follows:

- Extension of the programmes to all levels of formal education – primary, secondary and higher education, complemented by programmes of non-formal education.

- Integration of sex education into the general curriculum, without this leading to the creation of a special subject area, as sex education should be a continuous education throughout life.

- Continuous training in sex education of teachers through refresher courses at all levels, particularly the updating of their knowledge for those in charge of supervising these programmes.

- Constant collaboration and inter-disciplinary co-operation of official and private bodies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having identified and defined the needs of our countries at the various stages of the process of developing sex education programmes, the group considers it appropriate to make a series of recommendations, to be used as a basic frame of reference for individuals, institutions and governments involved in any way in sex education activities in Latin America.

I – Research

We start from the premise that adequate grass-roots research is essential to provide a solid empirical foundation and a reasonable chance of success for the programme.

In our opinion, many programmes in Latin America have failed due to lack of basic research, and therefore we recommend, as a first priority, the stimulation of this kind of research, regardless of the stage of development of the programme. We accept, however, that research must be directed primarily towards identifying the real needs and problems as lived and felt by the individual and recipients of the programme, and not to attempt to define objective and impersonal needs. Therefore we recommend that research and studies should be carried out at every stage, in order to obtain the following information:

1) *Basic Studies on Sexuality*

For example:

- Attitudes and knowledge related to sex.
- Sexual roles and socialization.
- Sexual disfunctions.

2) *Research into the Incidence of Social Problems* which, in part, may be a product of sexual problems: prostitution, venereal diseases, broken homes, induced abortion, unwanted pregnancies, illegitimate births, children born outside marriage, adolescent pregnancy, etc.

3) *Experimental and Pilot Projects* scientifically evaluated, with the aim of influencing attitudes and providing information in the field of sex, through social communication media, meetings, face-to-face contacts, school curricula and out-of-school programmes.

4) *Study of the Impact of Sex Education* on the sexual problems mentioned in 2).

5) *Inventory of Persons and Institutions Involved in Sex Education Activities in Latin America.*

II – Motivation

We consider that only by starting from a firm motivational base is it possible to create awareness of the acute problems experienced in the field of sexuality, in such a way as to lead to more dynamic programmes and action plans.

We further consider that any motivation strategies should, in the first place, be directed towards individuals or specific groups such as university teachers, professionals, politicians, leaders of public opinion and others, always depending on the degree of development of the programme concerned.

We recommend that any action carried out in this field should as a priority take into account the following four channels:

1) *Social Communication Media*

Radio, television, the press and others, are suitable for carrying talks, publicity spots, news and other relevant means of communication.

Special attention should be given to making use of already popular radio or television programmes in a given country, and trying to insert in them specific messages related to sex education.

It is strange to note that, hitherto, these media have been very little used, although they offer the advantages of working through existing infra-structures provided by the various institutions active in this area.

2) *Methods of Group Motivation*

All activities traditionally carried out face-to-face (talks, group discussions, seminars) are extremely important in any motivation work aimed at specific leaders who in one way or another might impede or facilitate the programme's development.

3) *Related Organizations*

These can be approached with the aim of collecting information about difficulties encountered, recommend strategies, names of individuals in a position to take decisions and other similar points which could form the basis for the further implementation of motivation programmes such as outlined in 1) and 2) above.

4) *Formal and Non-formal Education Systems*

Activities in this area should be specifically aimed at obtaining the commitment of the leaders in the three fields we consider should be concerned with sex education:

- *School System* (in- and out-of-school activity) – Motivation of teachers.
- *Community Development Programmes* – Motivation of leaders.
- *Public and Private Community Centres* – Motivation of professional personnel.

III – Training

Once the different leaders mentioned above are sufficiently motivated it will be necessary to provide continuous training to enlarge the scope of their knowledge and to acquaint them with the methods which will enable them to carry out specific activities in the field of sex education.

It is important here to stress the priority to be given to the 'training of trainers', the preparation of high-level leaders who could devote their own efforts primarily, and perhaps exclusively, to the preparation of 'multipliers'.

We also consider it necessary to emphasize strongly the continuous evaluation and re-adjustment of methodologies, curricula, etc, in the light of the effectiveness demonstrated by these leaders in the development of their specific activities. In this respect we recommend the creation of follow-up units within each national context in order to provide in-service support and supervision for all trained leaders.

IV – Diffusion

In previous paragraphs we have stressed the use of mass media in information and motivation activities.

Now we shall turn to the possibility of transforming these media into instruments of actual education of greater depth and more penetrating in its outreach together with support for the work carried out both at formal and non-formal levels.

The type of activities that could be developed are as follows:

- Radio and television (radio forums, courses, in-depth talks, counselling sessions, etc).
- The press (courses in the form of supplements, letters, articles about the relevant subjects, etc).
- Other media appropriate to the various characteristics of, and facilities available in, each particular country.

For reasons we have so far been unable to adequately define, we have observed that only minimal use of these media has been made in Latin American programmes – contrary to what common sense and modern technology would suggest.

We therefore recommend a revision of the work plans of all existing sex education programmes, in order to introduce, as a priority, educational strategies and components into these programmes.

V – Standardization

Our recommendations in this respect cannot possibly encompass the prevailing situation in all the various countries, in view of the fact that each and every one of our countries has its own political and legal system. Nonetheless, we must find a way to suggest to all governments that, once they have officially accepted sex education, in the normal course of events, they should include in it the concepts analysed in this report and the operational procedures which will allow the concepts to be put into practice.

VI – Programming

Although we accept and recognize that, ideally, sex education should be provided on an integrated and continuous basis throughout the individual's life, we think that, in practice, and when it is first introduced, it will be necessary to find practical ways of incorporating as much as is possible in the way of content and methodology into existing *formal and non-formal* general education programmes.

Being realistic, without being unduly conformist, we recommend that all action should be directed towards the gradual integration of aspects of sex education into the regular programmes of developmental activities, so as to give each government the chance to fulfil the commitments that nearly all our nations accepted during the World Population Conference in Bucharest, August 1974.

In other words it would, in our opinion, be most useful both for already existing sex education programmes and those to be initiated in the future – regardless of their present stage of development – to seek a way to integrate themselves into already existing national programmes, such as workers' education, skill training, housing, health, community development and others.

We would particularly stress the need to establish clearly, in each and every case, the nature and extent of the objectives to be achieved through the different programmes, so that they can be continuously evaluated and modified.

In establishing objectives, priority should be given, through integration into other community development programmes, to rural and marginal populations, among which we find the highest incidence of the sexual pathology described in the section on 'Research'.

Both in formal and non-formal education we must emphasize the joint participation of parents and children, because we consider that this is the most direct means of approaching the problems of sex, avoiding in a rational way a situation where the education provided could exacerbate differences or disagreements.

We understand that all programmes, in their various phases, must respond to the special characteristics of each country and each region, and therefore we urge all those responsible to design, develop, evaluate and modify them with this fact constantly in mind.

As regards the use of materials and teaching aids, while appreciating what has been achieved by more advanced programmes in this field, we feel it would be satisfactory to adapt already available material as well as developing new and original ideas.

VII – Services

It is important to stress that efforts aimed at obtaining social and official acceptance of the need for carrying out sex education through broader and more integrated programmes, may at first appear as an approach aimed at shifting the main educational responsibility from private bodies, the traditional pioneers in this field, to government and official systems. Nevertheless, as we see it, for some time to come, the pioneer activity of those private bodies would by no means be reduced, but would no doubt increase.

In fact, recognizing the need to organize wide-ranging education programmes, those responsible for them, both at formal and informal level, should, even more than in the past, seek the support of private agencies, as well as those organizations capable of orientating, directing and implementing the initial stages of the programmes.

Thus, for non-governmental agencies, this new stage would not only mean increased activity and greater responsibility but a real challenge, the only possible response to which would be to adapt their own services in a creative way to match the requirements of the task in hand.

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